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EXPERIENCES OF A PORTRAIT PAINTER.

I AM a retired portrait painter. I use this phrase because, from the circumstances which I am going to relate, my profession became a *trade*, so that I was very glad after thirty years' practice, to find that I had realized a sufficient sum to enable me to *retire from business*. My early childhood was spent in the common routine of schools, until I expressed a wish to learn drawing. The usual school course was given me, and this awakened what was implanted in me by nature—an intense love of drawing. Notwithstanding bad marks and punishments, I covered my books and exercises with heads and figures. When my master was lecturing me, I was considering the shape of his nose, and, when my schoolmates were studying their lessons, instead of following their example, I was drawing their portraits on the leaves of my book. This state of things at length called forth the remonstrances of my teachers and consequently of my parents. I exculpated myself as well as I could, and promised amendment, which promise I did not keep, for neither my heart nor my mind were interested in the duties they required of me, till at length, when I was old enough to say a word for myself, I declared my determination to be an artist. The same opposition from parents and prophecies of ruin from friends, but at length I won the battle. I was allowed to follow my own inclinations.

In due time, and by dint of perseverance and hard study, I acquired a good knowledge of the human form, and became a tolerable delineator of it. I then resolved to begin my artistic life by being a portrait painter. I hired a room in a central position in my native town, and fitted it up for a studio in the best way that my means and taste would allow. I colored the walls with a neutral tint, and covered the lower part of the window to exclude the light, then arranged rich draperies and busts in the most studied *négligé* imaginable, and hung out old engravings and specimens of my own brush on the walls. I then made my wishes known to the public, and sat down to wait for customers. At first, if I heard a footstep on the stairs, I thought some one was coming to have a portrait painted; but by degrees not even a knock at my door made my heart palpitate. I was beginning to feel down-hearted, when at length one day, as I was reading, perhaps for the fiftieth time, Reynolds' Lectures on Painting, a gentleman came in and immediately asked me what I charged for portraits. I was rather startled, for such exalted ideas had I of my art, that I had hardly thought of my prices, and I imagined that every one else would feel in the same way. However, I told him as well as I could what I expected to get. He made some demur; but at last arranged to come the next day for his first sitting. My delight can hardly be imagined. That night, instead of sleeping, I was settling in my head how the portrait should be; the man's image was so entirely daguerreotyped on my mind that I might have painted it from recollection. The next morn-

ing I took a walk into the country to brace my nerves. I returned long before the time appointed for the sitting, set my palette, arranged the room in my most artistic style, and listened anxiously to every step. The hour struck and he was at the door. His dress was not what I should have chosen as a picturesque costume, but still I thought it would give *character* to the portrait. A choice of attitude was no easy matter; standing, sitting, the hand extended as if claiming, the head turned with a Byronic twist, everything was tried; but nothing seemed to suit the sitter. For my part I should have been easily satisfied; a simple and unconstrained posture, an unaffected expression, is all that is wanted. At length the composition was fixed upon, and the sitting began. At first I could hardly keep my countenance, so ludicrous was the sight before me. I afterwards learned to be imperturbable under the most provocative circumstances; screwed-up mouths, languishing eyes, grimaces, heroic attitudes, nothing would make me laugh, or even smile. I, however, managed to catch the character of the face partly by watching the natural expression before and after the sitting, and partly by practice; but the young beginner labors under great disadvantages from this cause. He often falls into an affected manner of drawing, which he finally mistakes for nature. Another disadvantage of these constrained positions is, that they cannot be kept long enough to give the artist a fair chance of painting a correct likeness; the sitter is soon tired, goes away, and leaves the artist, with a slight sketch, to finish from recollection or from a model, who is of course entirely different from the original of the portrait. These difficulties I, in common, I suppose, with every young portrait painter, had to contend with at first; they made me get into a habit of dashing off a picture often, I am afraid, to the detriment of the drawing. Instead of increasing my knowledge by my sitter, I was constantly obliged to hire models to draw from, in order to keep my hand in, and not to lose sight of nature entirely.

But to return to my first sitter. The first day nothing was said, either from diffidence or from consideration of its being so slight a sketch; but the second day the complaints began. "The nose was too long, the eyes too small, the hair not the right color." I was staggered, for I had done my best; and, as far as it went, I thought I had at least hit on a likeness. I suggested that, when it was more advanced, the picture might give better satisfaction; but the more it advanced, the louder were complaints. "The background was not right." That, I of course altered with little demur. Instead of the dark background which I had thought appropriate, I was requested to place the gentleman on an Italian terrace, overlooking the sea. We were in an inland town, and he had never been abroad in his life. I afterward got into the habit of asking the sitter what background he or she would have; my own choice was almost invariably a wrong one. Sometimes they would choose to be placed beside a marble pillar, perhaps leaning on it in a heroic or languishing attitude; sometimes in a

ball-room, or in a garden; in fact they wanted a pretty picture, not a portrait. The *dress* of my first sitter was entirely wrong; "I had not given the peculiar shade of the cloth of his coat; his clean, white shirt collar and bosom had dark streaks on them, as if they were dirty; the pattern of his waistcoat was not exactly copied." I altered these things as well as the shadings and unity of my picture would allow; but the *face* puzzled me. I found that unless I altered the features almost entirely they would not suit; the nose was to be made more delicate, and the shade of it on the cheek was to be taken out, "it made the face look dirty;" the mouth was to be smaller, the eyes larger and brighter, the complexion smoother and more highly colored; the hair, which in the original was grizzled, was to be pure black; even the light was not to strike on it, for it made it look as if it were grey. Worried and perplexed, I altered as much as possible, thinking that by pleasing him, I might get other sitters, who would be more reasonable. At length the portrait was finished, paid for, and carried off; and in due time more sitters came; but unfortunately they were *scarcely* more reasonable. In the midst of painting one of them, and about three months after my first sitter had left, in he walked again one day, followed by a man bearing his portrait. It had not given satisfaction yet. His friends thought it looked too old. I was dismayed, but promised to try again, and made an appointment for another sitting. What could I do! a beginner, depending on my art for my support, and being sure not to get that support, unless I succeeded in pleasing my sitters. Determined not to err this time, I made him a perfect Apollo. The likeness could hardly be discovered. That was not regarded however. It was pronounced exactly like. The friends came flocking to my studio to see it, and some of them there and then ordered their own portraits. Alas! I had learned a sad lesson: I must degrade my art: in order to succeed I must flatter my sitters inordinately! I must make my hand paint what my eyes did not see. I was in hopes at first that this was only a peculiarity of my first sitter and his friends. Hitherto I had only had persons recommended by him; but I found in after years that, although few carried their vanity to the pitch that my *first* sitter did, they were almost all more or less anxious to be considered handsomer than they really were.

And here I will do justice to the female sex. Although women are accused of being much more vain than men, my experience has proved to me, at least, the contrary. Only in a few instances have I found the ladies as exacting as the men. Sometimes I have heard girls, gifted by nature with all the charms of Hebe, say that they thought I had flattered them. Now, a truly beautiful woman cannot be done justice to either by painter or by poet, so that in these cases, instead of flattering, I was falling far short of the originals. Once, indeed, a lady sat to me who considered that her figure was not good; so she asked a friend who had a fine figure to sit for her. The effect of the combination may be imagined. To an artist's eye, at least, it was

putting the portraits of two different persons in one stereoscope, for the figure, whether handsome or otherwise, always harmonizes with the head. Once, too, a Spanish lady sat to me, when she had absolutely *made-up* her face to such an extent with varnishes, cosmetics, and paints, that she looked more like a china doll than a human being. Her own complexion was of an exquisite olive brown, as I saw one day when she was not sitting to me, and it was a sin to spoil it in that way. I longed to tell her so, but that would have been a mortal offence; for, of course, her object was to make me and every one else think that *that* was her complexion. But what I generally found ladies most particular about was, their dress. They did not know that the dress is only what we technically call an *accessory*; that it is something to lead the eye, as it were, to the face, which ought to be the principal part of the picture; or, at all events, the dress ought to attract no part of the attention away from the face. I have often had portraits returned to me to alter, because the diamonds (the originals were sometimes paste) were not large enough, or the pattern of the lace was not exact, or the new silk put on for the occasion had not quite enough lustre—"it looked like an old one." Sometimes children would come to me, who, instead of sitting tolerably quiet, would frisk about the room, or stand at my elbow, while I was painting them; but on the whole, I liked them, for I generally got a glimpse of nature in them. It was only now and then that an older child would come who had already imbibed the notion that, in order to have a pretty portrait, one must make up a face while one is being painted; perhaps from injunctions or example of its parents.

I have had my bits of romance, too. Fair young girls, whom my youthful imagination invested with all that makes woman charming, haunted my dreams. While I was painting *them* my studio was a paradise; when they were gone I have thrown down my brushes in despair at not being able to reproduce what was perhaps only in my imagination. Sometimes, no doubt, it was in the original; and then, as I said before, it was unapproachable by art. Scenes of pathos have come in my way, too. I have been called out to paint the sick or the dead. The most painful thing of the kind I ever had to do, was to paint the portrait of a dead infant. Its mother bathed it in her tears as she held it on her lap. There was an unearthly and unchild-like expression in the divine serenity of its face, which I would not represent, because I knew that that expression was of death, and that it was already giving intense pain in the original. To represent it in all the bloom and beauty of life, would not do either; it would be too great a contrast; so I painted it as if in a gentle sleep. But the ludicrous predominated in every other scene. Generally I had only repetitions and variations of what I have already described in my first sitter, with other additions useless to enumerate, till my delightful profession became to me, as I said at first, only a trade. I was obliged for my daily subsistence to paint, not what I knew to be true and right, but what

my customers exacted, so that I sometimes even wished that I had taken my friends' advice, and gone into business. My aspirations, my visions, all died away, and I became a mere journeyman portrait painter.

And all this is the fault of the public. By being so absolutely ignorant about art, they actually discourage it. They do not even treat their artists with as much consideration as they do their mechanics. When a person orders a chair to be made, he does not interfere with the man who is to make it, but lets him use his own judgment and knowledge about it. If you ask him why he does not interfere, he will tell you that it is because he does not know anything about making chairs; neither does he know anything about painting portraits. And that is just what I wish to insist upon—the public should know as much about painting as they do about chair-making; that is, when they have found out that an artist draws correctly, and has a sufficient acquaintance with the principles of his art, let him have his own way. If they think he does not know enough, or if they do not like his mode of painting, let them not employ him, and he will either learn more or else take to some other way of making his living. So fully am I impressed with these things, that I have brought up sons in the most unartistic manner imaginable. Not one of them can draw a straight line, nor should I recommend any young man to take up painting as a profession, unless he feels himself decidedly capable of following some other branch of it besides portrait painting.



The sciences of which the study affords the greatest exercise to the understanding, are not those whose principles are the most fixed and demonstrable, as, for instance, natural philosophy or mathematics; but such as involve a degree of fluctuation, and require the balancing of probabilities, as political or mental philosophy, ethics, or human nature in its individual manifestations. To borrow an illustration from the fine arts: the former may be compared to the capitals of Corinthian columns, or friezes of regular proportions, which, however necessary or ornamental, demand no invention or fancy in the architect, but only adherence to a model, with a certain amount of mechanical skill. The latter resemble the Arabesque or old Gothic embellishments, the draperies and more intricate combinations of beauty, which requires not only a wider range, but a loftier order of talent.—*Clulow.*

A FRIEND of mine happened one day to visit a Carthusian. It was in the month of May, and the garden of this solitary man was covered with flowers, along the borders and walls, while he sat retired in his room, a stranger to the beautiful spectacle. "How happens it," said my friend to him, "that you have closed your shutters?" "I do it," replied the Carthusian, "that I may meditate, without interruption, on the attributes of the Divinity." "And you expect," rejoined my friend, "to discover more striking attributes of the Divinity in your reflections than in contemplating the works of nature at this delightful season? If you will take my advice, you will open your shutters, and close your imagination."—*St. Pierre.*

THE LADY OF THE HARP.

[A version for the CRAYON of the *Tavim-Novelle* in the *Wanderbuch* of Franz Dingelstedt, published in Leipzig in 1839.]

I.

"Look o' here, ladies and gentlemen—a veritable gem, and the master-piece of this year's exhibition!" Thus, with the appreciative tone of a *dilettante*, the old counsellor cried out, as he planted himself before the painting at a suitable distance, chosen with all knowledge of effect, and in the midst of a circle of observers, before whom, with great indefatigableness, he was playing the part of a *cicerone*.

"Magnificent! wonderful!" was whispered about the group—for the old counsellor was thought such a *connaisseur* that no one hesitated to follow his lead.

"What a vigorous and nervous pencil! What rich colors to the flesh and garments!" drawled out a couple of fops, as they lowered their *lorgnette*, and drew proudly back into the region of their cravats, happy in the belief that they had made a hit in their remark. Another one of your fine wits was glad to discover the picture to be a costly one, and, with a flourish of his pencil, which he held in readiness as he went through the catalogue of the sale, marked down a bold *nota bene* against the number.

The picture hung near a window, so that a full and advantageous light was thrown upon it. It represented, in life-size, a maiden of some sixteen years, holding a harp in her arms. Her dark and glossy hair lay in a wavy outline about a face that was pale, while the head was bent a little to one side, and one felt the steady glow of her deep black eyes beneath their long lashes. Her small white fingers played languidly with the strings of the instrument. The design was certainly very simple. It seemed to be rather a portrait than a fancy-piece, so real and warm lay the glow of life upon the features. The details and accessories were of no account—merely a black silk robe that brought out so much the better the transparency of the rest, and heightened the effect of the half-naked arm. The harp and background were put in with a few hasty strokes. The art of the piece was concentrated in the features of the girl, which were wonderfully beautiful. One could hardly cease gazing at those soft-brown, deep-reaching eyes—like stars of a rapturous and mild spring night, they looked out from that pale and gentle face. A quiet pensiveness—like a breath, like a veil—seemed to overlie its expression, and those fresh lips looked as if they were moving in secret converse, or were faintly uttering some unknown song.

The counsellor and his troop had now left the picture, and I heard his voice at the other end of the hall, where with two words he pronounced a death-judgment on a landscape. He went about like the showman of a menagerie, marking with his finger the different pictures, working himself with hand and foot into a glow of perspiration, and was doubtless very happy.

I thanked heaven he was out of the way, and for the few